

Message Text

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SUBJECT: RELIABILITY OF U.S. COMMITMENTS

REF: PARIS 12231

1. WITH THE NOTABLE EXCEPTION OF THE PRIME MINISTER WHO ADDRESSED THE SUBJECT DURING HIS WASHINGTON PRESS CONFERENCE MAY 7, SENIOR BRITISH MINISTERS HAVE MADE LITTLE PUBLIC COMMENT IN THE WAKE OF VIETNAM ABOUT THE RELIABILITY OF THE U.S. DEFENSE SECRETARY MASON'S AFFIRMATION EARLY THIS WEEK OF CONFIDENCE IN THE U.S. THEREFORE IS OF MORE THAN MARGINAL IMPORTANCE. SPEAKING ON MAY 11 IN DEFENSE OF BRITAIN'S MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMON MARKET, THE DEFENSE SECRETARY SAID WITHDRAWAL OF BRITAIN FROM THE EEC COULD WELL BE SEEN BY THE U.S. AS REFLECTING A "LITTLE ENGLAND MENTALITY" THAT COULD BRING INTO QUESTION BRITAIN'S CONTINUED WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY IN THE COMMON DEFENSE. "IF THERE IS ONE LESSON WHICH I CAN DRAW FROM RECENT EVENTS IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA", MASON SAID, "IT IS NOT THAT THE UNITED STATES ARE UNWILLING TO SUPPORT THEIR ALLIES, BUT THAT THEY MAY FIND IT DIFFICULT TO DO SO IF THOSE ALLIES ARE UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO MAKE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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A SUFFICIENT EFFORT IN THEIR OWN DEFENSE."

2. COMMENT. THERE HAS BEEN A GOOD DEAL OF SPECULATION ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE U.S. WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM (SEE LONDON 6294) -- ALL OF WHICH SUGGESTS STRONGLY A WIDESPREAD CONVICTION THAT THE U.S. WILL BE A BETTER AND LESS DISTRACTED ALLY NOW THAT THE SOUTHEAST ASIA ABBERRATION IS AT AN END.

3. WILSON'S WASHINGTON STATEMENT TOGETHER WITH MASON'S REFLECT THE GOVERNMENT'S CONVICTION THAT VIETNAM PER SE HAS NO SINISTER MEANING FOR U.S. COMMITMENTS IN EUROPE. LAST WEEK'S COMMONS DEBATE ON THE DEFENSE WHITE PAPER WAS FREE FROM ANY IMPLICATION THAT THE U.S. COMMITMENT IS LESS THAN FIRM.

4. NEVERTHELESS, IMPORTANT POLITICAL FIGURES AND RESPECTED JOURNALISTS IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION CONTINUE TO SHOW SOME UNEASE ABOUT THE GENERAL DISPOSITION OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND CONGRESS TO SUPPORT THE KIND OF OUTWARD LOOKING AND COMMITTED FOREIGN POLICY FAVORED BY THE FORD ADMINISTRATION. THE SOLID POPULAR AND CONGRESSIONAL BACKING GIVEN TO THE PRESIDENT'S HANDLING OF THE MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT HAS HELPED CONSIDERABLY TO DISPEL THIS UNEASE.

RICHARDSON

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